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Date: Sat, 28 May 94 14:09:57 EDT
From: "Charles J. Stivale" <CSTIVAL-AT-CMS.CC.WAYNE.EDU>
Subject: VirtFut3

Various real-life tasks have occupied my time since early May such that I've been unable to seize upon the momentum that the splendid U of Warwick conference created in order to provide a report of it to this list. As my previous short post refering to the conference indicated, it was at once productive and fraught with tensions, as much from local sources as from the usual collision of modes of conceptualization.

While Joan Broadhurst provided the list of the proceedings in an earlier post, I'll refresh your memory in terms of the broad framework, and provide slight emendations to the schedule as it actually unfolded:

Fri May 6th 1994:
14h: Opening Address, David Wood (Chair of Philosophy, U of Warwick)
Plenary 1: Stephen Pfohl (Boston Collge, Sociology), "Theses on the Cyberotics of History: Venus in Microsoft, Remix

16h45: Parallel Sessions, 1
SO.20: Eric Cassidy (U of Warwick, Phil), "Apocalyptic Cybernetics"
Stephen Metcalfe (U of Birmingham), "Crash Sex (Barthes, Bataille, Baudrillard)"
Stephen Mooney (London School of Economics), "The Cyberstate" SO.19: Matthew Kiernan
SO.19: Matthew Kiernan (U of Leeds, Phil), "Sexual Simulation"
Keekok Lee (U of Manchester, Phil and the Environment), "Nanotechnology, the Ultimate Green Technology?"
Benjamin Macias (Cambridge U Computer Lab), "Virtual Communities, Representation of the Self, and Religion"

19h: Plenary 2: Charles J. Stivale (Wayne State U, French), "The Rhizomatics of Cyberspace"

21h: Plenary 3: Iain Hamilton Grant (U of Warwick, Phil), "Black Ice"

Sat 7th May 1994:
10h: Plenary 4: Sadie Plant (U of Birmingham, Cultural Studies), "Coming Across the Future"

11h30: Parallel 2 [NB: Stivale used this time to visit the book exhibit and to experiment with some of the CD-ROM software, including "A Digital Rhizome" created at the U of New South Wales]
SO.21: John Pickering (U of Warwick, Psychology), "Sex, Lies and Videorape"
Andrew Calcutt (Journalist), "Virtual Panic"
SO.20: Brennan Wauters (McGill U), "Baudrillard's Blindness: Rhetoric and the Drive for Object Absorption"
Pete Mills (U of Wwarwick, Phil), "Visceral Interfacing"

14h: Plenary 5: David Porush (Technion, Israel Inst of Technology), "Telepathy and Illiteracy: Alphabetic Consciousness and the Age of Cyberotics"

15h30 Parallel 3:

SO.20: Diane Beddoes (U of Warwick, Phil), "V is for Virtual"
Suhail Malik (U of Sussex, English) "The Immateriality of the Signifier: The Flesh and the Innocence of Michael Jackson"
Jules Haston (U of Warwick, Phil) "Virtual Val's Night Job on the Strata"
SO.21: Leigh Clayton (The Old Brewery, Old Aberdeen, Phil), "The Virtual Universe: Visual Metaphors and the Non-Visual"
Samantha Holland (The Old Brewer, Old Aberdeen, Phil), "Descartes Goes to Hollywood: Mind Body and Gender in Contemporary Cyborg Films"
Megan Stern (U of Central Lancashire, Cultural Studies), "Learning to be Human: Heideggerian Heroics in 'Blade Runner'"

18h: Parallel 4:
SO.20: Ralph Schroeder (Brunel U, Human Sciences), "Lost in Cyberspace: The Cultural Significance of Virtual Worlds"
Michael Forrester (U of Kent), "Can Narratology Facilitate Communication Successful Hypermedia Events?"
SO.19: John Collins (U of Warwick, Phil) "Representation and Cognition: Biting the Bullet"
Michael McGuire (King's College, Phil), "Cyberspace - A Type of Space"

20h30: Plenary 6: Stelarc, "Phantom Body/Fluid Self: Images as Agents in Virtual Reality Environments"
Pat Cadigan

After (until 12:30): House of God D.J. Collective

Sunday 8th May 1994
10h: Plenary 7: Manuel De Landa

12h30: Parallel 5
SO.21: Ben Rumble (U of Sussex), "Screens"
John Sellars (U of Wales, Phil), "Transcending Technofear"
SO.20: Paul Tappenden (King's College, Phil), "The Concept of Brain"
John Mullarkey (U of Warwick, Phil): "Myself and other Computer-Minds: Intentional Stances, Turing TEsts and the Primacy of Perception"

15h: Plenary 8: Ian Stewart and Jack Cohen (U of Warwick)
Greg Hunt (U of Warwick), "Virtual Futures, Never Explain?"

17h: Plenary 9: Nick Land, "Meltdown"

This outline is clearly barebones, and even the most diligent conference-goer, which I am not, has gaps. Thus, while I attended all the plenaries, I missed some of the parallel session, in some cases simply to take a break, in others to have a bite to eat as well. While the conference has "breaks" built in, they disappeared as sessions went overlong and scheduling had to shift, i.e. as in many conferences.

References has been made on the list (Michael Current relaying a comment by Joan Broadhurst, to which I responded) that the conference broke down into and American/Warwickian divide. As I have stated, this view misrepresents the unfolding of the conference, not to mention the numerous non-Warwick persons in attendance as well as the dissonance

among Warwickians themselves. What the view represents is the cleavage that I perceived from my arrival in Coventry, and I'll repeat myself from an earlier post to the list:
What I did discover, and learn from immensely, was the fascinating preference among *some* folks I met in Warwick toward _Anti-Oedipus_ as Ur-text of D&G, mainly since it is perceived to express an unrelenting political position of schizoanalysis. Whereas _ATP_, and many other D&G pieces/interviews since, express a *pragmatics* and sets of distinctions that extol *caution*. This split, between a politics of deterritorialization without limits and a more cautious view toward the consequences of such a no-holds-barred politics, constituted the crux, I believe, of the *differend* [characterizes as American/Warwickian].

Many of the tensions that built up through the conferences seemed to arise from numerous sites: the outright hostility of those Warwickians who, for whatever reason (philosophical, professional, personal, and combinations thereof) had absolutely no sympathy/patience/use for such an event as a "Virtual Futures" conf; a nostalgia among some present for the good old days when theorizing could proceed without consideration of practical consequences, and within this strain of thought emerged an even more peculiar 'becoming-same,' to the point that one's personal habits (e.g. non-smoking, in my case) might be called into question as some sort of failure to engage in 'necessary' deterritorialization; reflections on different aspects of thought related to Virtual Futures (not only D&G oriented) some of which translated *caution* if not outright skepticism toward an uncritical acceptance of the benefits of 'technoculture'.

Given my own interests, the papers of Benjamin Macias on virtual communities and Samantha Holland on the cyborg films (especially her form of presentation: she prepared an excellent video in which selected film clips screened behind her reading *in* the video) were quite valuable. Also, all of the plenaries, Stelarc's in particular, opened my mind's eyes to new possibilities on V. Futures. However, the momentum to which I've referred built up to Nick Land's "Meltdown" talk, and this moment was in some ways a culmination and a summing up of much that had preceded. Here is a sample, from the abstract provided to all participants:

"Modernity races through intensive half-lives : 1500, 156, 1884, 1948, 1980, 1996, 2004, 2008, 2010, 211... Closing upon Terrestrial Meltdown Singularity, and triggering terminal political crisis across the planet. Reverse transcription subverts genomic (ROM) command structures, and tradition-based authority dissipates in artificial space. Having climbed the negentropy curve from industrial thermocontrol to the brink of soft technocataclysm, power panics and condenses the Human Security System. Looming green-black schizoshapes begin to come up on the screen.
Cyberian invasion deploys the future as a weapon, camouflaged in history as global technocapital convergence. Disintegrating social reality skids into cyberpunk, and you find yourself reformatted in Globewar-5. Meltdown virus is infiltrating from tomorrow, cooking protection in bottom-up intelligentsia, and hacking through the ICE-fortresses of SF (security futurism) to spring feral connectionist-AI emergence from anthropomorphizing Asimov-ROM. It's a mess: trashed meat all over the place, and China-syndrome running away from control. Wintermute is getting vicious. Then VIRTUAL FUTURES happens, and things really turn horrific . . ."

What is one to make of this 'vision'? David Porush asked Land, where is the pleasure coming from in this projection of 'meltdown', is it the pleasure of the horror? Stelarc's series of queries were even more pointed: wasn't Land positing a kind of technophobia? Land claimed that on the contrary, it was not him making such a postulate, but that it is inherent to the top-down hierarchy from which meltdown inevitably proceeds. Stelarc objected that he doesn't by into the

discourse of technofear, and that while Land implied a lot of intention on the part of top-down repression, Land's own 'bottom-up' intention is to disrupt the top-down through some disabling strategy aimed at the Human Security System, but also carrying on as if some autonomous, intelligent, decentered, self-regulating network were in place now. To Land's response that the nanospasm plateau is not impossible, that the planet is constructed into a kind of nano-playdough, Stelarc doubts that these forces would congeal so simplistically. Stelarc sees the body as accelerating and also being invaded while interfacing with digital systems and data spaces, in some ways enhancing what it means to be human. Land responded he was simply attempting to designate boundaries that are being set up by security systems.

The next phase of the discussion occurred with Manuel De Landa juxtaposing _AO_ to _ATP_: whereas the former preached, let's destratify like crazy, the latter reflected an aging, even courtesy: if we want to transform this world into something a little less homogeneous, our resistance has to become more pragmatic, and not destratify too fast lest the strata fall on us harder than ever, i.e. avoiding a careless destratification/acceleration that might provoke re-stratification with a vengeance. Here, Land vociferously contested the subject positions and intentionality that De Landa was attributing to AO/ATP, i.e. D & G as constituted subjects, vs. (what I'll call) a de-subjectified, destratified understanding of these works as 'texts', not necessarily attributable to subject-specific intentionalities.

The *differend* heated up at this point, Land questioning De Landa's use of the very term "we" as a very stratified 'readout' to enunciate his position (i.e. Landa maintained that our bodies act upon strata through our subjectivity for an empirically objective duration, and while we can deterritorialize/ destratify while we are upon them by all kinds of means, these means do not occur solely devoid of subjectivity). Pfohl interjected that it was not only problematic for Land to use the term 'post-human', but was philosophically irresponsible to discuss these problematics solely in terms of the destratification of flows. Ivan Benjamin asked Land where was his irony, and suggested that in dealing with the future, we're dealing also with it through the now, and not just through flows; that Land's position runs the risk of a) failing to deal with the now at all, and b) letting technofear read out of context be employed against any work in the now at all, even on the flow. To Land's response, that this response was bizarrely over-defensive given the terrain, and that we have strategies now to employ our tools at hand, Benjamin asked that Land provide an example of such tools at hand, so that we could deploy them. Here, Land fell (dramatically) silent. Stelarc suggested, however, that some alternate strategies might be found, for example, in work by artists to subvert stratified modes of perception.

Porush continued in the preceding vein: he said that Land unleashed a lot of pleasure in his 'meltdown', self-marginalizing subversive text, but also apocalypse: that the text urges and embraces the apocalypse at the same time as it warns against it. Porush said that such pleasure might turn quickly to other things, and that there is something irresponsible in unleashing this apocalyptic view as a form of pleasure. Land said he had a lack of sympathy with responsibility as a concept, that it constitutes a crushing form of stratification. He asked, further, at the end of the day, does being responsible really put you on the side of the angels? We're so sedimented with years of responsibility, but this is merely a way to hang onto a sense of control, which itself is a part of the problem, not part of the solution. Diane Beddoes asked if Land's use of the term subject implied such an autonomous sense of subjectivity that his use displaced the term in history. To Land's disagreement with her formulation, Beddoes suggested that he needs to provide a better story than simply to tell us to deterritorialize/destratify.

All this is obviously a reconstruction of the final discussion, totally without the context a) of the days that led up to it and b) of the actual talk that Nick Land presented. However, the cyberorgasmic/ apocalyptic edge that several discussants pointed to emerged in a number of talks and in a form of discourse, prevalent among one part of the Warwick group, that seemed/seems to equate destratifying/ deterritorializing merely with a discursive strategy that provides no practical means of developing new lines of flight. In any event, important points were raised and seem already to bear fruit, e.g. the proposal of a conference in 1995 entitled ambitiously, 'Capitalism and Schizophrenia 3'! Be there, or be square!

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